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The choice between two cities: whore, bride, and empire in the apocalypse

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book. Here we are treated to one the best explanations of how knowing God's promise of the *future* might move the Christian church to live a life of love with God's many people *today*. Wolfhart Pannenberg is never quoted here but Gonzalez explains the "ontological presupposition of the priority of the future" in a language we can all understand.

Gonzalez hits the mark with this book. He is an excellent communicator who uses good illustrations, humour, and personal passion in getting his points across to the reader. His brief sweeps of history are colourful, economical and relevant. His grappling with biblical texts in the context of historical and cultural issues then and now are fresh and highly topical for a church today which finds itself in need of new life in the midst of cultural upheaval. His multicultural reading of the book of Acts and Revelation is especially powerful as we struggle to form churches and communities with many peoples.

While inspiring a re-reading of the biblical text and our own times with new multicultural lenses, Gonzalez is not naive. He uses stories from his own life and from the early church to say that while there is something "sweet" about a multicultural vision of church or society, the "bitter" side is there too: The multicultural church "involves much more than bringing a bit of colour and folklore into our traditional worship services. It involves radical changes..." (92).

This is an excellent short read which brings missiology, history and good Bible study to bear on current cultural conflicts in the church. This is a book for the pastor and for students of the New Testament. What the work is ideal for, though, is adult Sunday School class. You get to hit two birds with this one stone. This easy to read book will gently introduce the church both to a new understanding of Revelation and inspire informed debate of a new vision of a church which does not hide from cultural debates but thrives there where the Holy Spirit is tenaciously working.

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The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride and Empire in the Apocalypse

Barbara R. Rossing
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999
180 pages, \$25.25 Softcover

The thesis of Rossing's work is simple. The two women of John's

Apocalypse, the whore and the bride, depict two choices for the ancient Christian audience. The choice for the whore is Babylon (Rome), the choice for bride is the new Jerusalem. The choice of following the “evil woman” or the “good woman” is an old device used rhetorically by the classic Greek moralists and then the Hebrew wisdom writers. In chapter two Rossing examines this frequently used “two women” fable, placing the story of Hercules having to choose between the women, Virtue and Vice, as the “stock moral fable” which was popular in antiquity. What follows then is an examination of the ways in which the two-women *topos* was used rhetorically by the moralists to argue for a given philosophy, career, war action or political outcome. The two-woman *topos* finds its way to Revelation not directly from the moralists but via Hebrew wisdom literature, namely Proverbs 1-9 and selected Qumran texts.

Having established the “two-woman” motif, Rossing then moves in her next chapters to a close study of the whore, the bride, Babylon and Rome in Revelation with close attention to how the two-women device is used and modified. Chapter three is a study of Revelation 17 and explores the personification of Babylon/Rome as the whore who rides the beast. In the next chapter, the Babylon lamented over and taunted in Revelation 18 is shown to be the oppressive imperial city, Rome. Finally, having been introduced to the evil woman/city, John’s audience is then invited to follow the good woman of Revelation 19 into the New Jerusalem of 21 and 22. This is a thorough, scholarly study of the final chapters of the book of Revelation. Rossing is conversing with and adding to the most recent critical studies in apocalyptic literature. Her argument is highly organized and detailed, with concise summaries of other scholars’ arguments, fine introductions to ancient writings and exhaustive footnotes. This work firmly places her in the list of scholars who are taking the wisdom tradition and rhetorical criticism seriously in the study of Revelation.

Rossing’s book has some intriguing responses to various feminist critiques of the depiction of women, especially the whore of Babylon. While respecting those scholars who see misogynous themes in John’s work, Rossing takes another route. The two women are only there to introduce the two ways, the political choices, for the Christian community. Once the audience sees the two-women *topos*, the women fade to the background and the evil or good city comes to the fore. Further, as Rossing shows by looking at ancient siege texts, the violent destruction of the whore of Babylon is not about personal violence directed to an individual, but about a city in siege. This is but one example of what Rossing does well with these texts from Revelation. By showing us the moralists and the Hebrew wisdom which is a backdrop to John’s writing the reader is able to see how John has used and transformed those traditions to encourage entrance of the community into the new Jerusalem.

This is a great read for those who are seriously interested in Revelation and other apocalyptic writings and the role of women in the Bible. This work is also

for those who want to see a prime example of how the classic moralist and Hebrew wisdom traditions function in the New Testament. Certainly if you are preaching from or studying the later part of Revelation, this is the commentary to read.

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Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity

Paula Fredriksen
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999
327 pages, \$39.00 Hardcover

As a Jesus of History “Scholar wannabe” I looked forward to reading and reviewing Paula Fredriksen’s recent work on the historical Jesus. It came to me with some strong recommendations. Unfortunately my overwhelming reaction to the book remains a profound disappointment. Not surprisingly, in the welter of widely divergent reconstructions of the historical Jesus, I find myself drawn powerfully to some, such as John Dominic Crossan and William R. Herzog II’s, and passionately at variance with others, including Marcus Borg and to a lesser extent, N. T. Wright’s. Yet in all these, I found myself comfortable with the researchers’ careful scholarship. Even though I disagree, as well, with Dr. Fredriksen’s portrayal, it is not her reconstruction as such which troubles me. After all, scholarly debate stands as the lifeblood of academic work. Rather, what disturbs me in Dr. Fredriksen’s *Jesus of Nazareth* is the data she uses, the data she doesn’t use and the ways she brings together her material. Sadly I find her reconstruction quite thin.

Initially I was intrigued by her thesis that there are two indisputable facts – Jesus’ execution by Pilate and the non-execution of Jesus’ followers. She puts it this way: “This is a crucial anomaly. Because it is established by two absolutely secure historical facts, it will serve as the driving wheel for my effort here to reconstruct the Jesus of history” (9). With this introduction, I was eager to see her argument unfolding from these premises. I continued to be with her on the danger of inserting anachronisms into our interpretations – all history of Jesus scholars strive mightily not to fall into this trap, at least without a clear recognition that this is happening or is, to some extent, inevitable. However, at this point in her discussion of sources, my alarms began to buzz. She spoke of our canonical texts, Philo, Josephus, as well she should. At the same time, she overwhelmingly